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DEPT FOR SCA/FO DAS CAMP, SCA/A, PRM  
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NSC FOR JWOOD  
OSD FOR SHIVERS  
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [IR](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: Iran: Another Wave of Deportations?

Ref: A - 08 Kabul 97  
B - 07 Kabul 4006  
C - 08 Kabul 1493

11. (SBU) Summary: Per a July 12 letter from the Afghan Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation (MORR) office in Tehran, Iran will start deporting 85,000 Afghans at the beginning of the Persian month of Asad (July 22). Iran has already deported over 166,000 Afghans since January 1, 2008, mostly young single men who are not registered refugees but illegal economic migrants. The new deportations, however, would include 50,000 refugees who hold Amayash II cards (Iranian refugee identity cards) but failed to register for new Amayesh III cards. Thirty-five thousand "illegals" would also be deported, which MORR officials believe includes Amayesh III holders who remain in "No Go Areas" (NGAs) such as Sistaan-Baluchistan. These rumors have swirled for weeks; the IROA sent us a diplomatic note in late June alerting us to an impending deportation, but with no details as to who would be deported or when. MORR and UNHCR used this time to lobby against mass deportations but Iran continues to hold this sword of Damocles over Afghanistan's head. We expect an uptick in deportations but believe Iran will stay below a threshold that would trigger international protests.

#### Possible Political and Humanitarian Fallout

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12. (SBU) Deportations increased slightly from April through June, although they are still lower than the same period last year, when Iran deported almost 150,000 individuals (and 365,000 over the entire year). Iran reportedly wanted to delay major deportations until after the Paris Conference to avoid embarrassing the Iranian delegation or provoking criticism at the conference. A mass deportation might spark a political crisis in Afghanistan similar to last year's parliamentary no-confidence vote against Foreign Minister Spanta and the firing of MORR Minister Akbar. The relatively new MORR Minister Sheer Mohammad Etebari, who has already had run-ins with Parliament, would likely be fired. He may welcome this outcome. He is physically and mentally exhausted and unable to lead his ministry; one of his own key staffers is rumored to be inciting MPs to introduce a no-confidence vote against him. President Karzai is rumored to want him out.

13. (SBU) UNHCR Kabul says it has placed its office in Zaranj, Nimruz province, (where most deportations occur) on standby and is checking stocks of food and non-food items. A UN contingency plan exists to provide assistance to vulnerable individuals but not to young, single men, who make up the bulk of current deportees. Legally,

however, UNHCR believes it could charge refoulement (failure to protect against forcible return to a territory where a refugee's life or freedom would be threatened) of Amayesh II holders who failed to reregister or Amayesh III holders living in NGAs. UNHCR is also prepared to "register its concern" over deportations of any vulnerable individuals, regardless of status.

To Be Or Not To Be A Refugee...

14. (SBU) The Amayesh III registration process (Ref A) has been more successful than expected but still resulted in some refugees "defaulting" into undocumented status. The process started slowly due to onerous on-line registration processes and complicated rules, but the Afghan refugee community in Iran rallied and are expected to register over 1.2 million people. (The registration also shows a distinct increase in the number of children and more mixed marriages between Afghans and Iranians.) Most registrations occurred in the evening, when the computer-savvy younger generation registered family, friends, and neighbors after work and school. The registration process ended on May 9 and authorities are expected to issue new cards in 30 to 90 days. The Iranian government now considers those who did not register as undocumented illegal aliens, subject to immediate deportation.

The Carrot Approach: Short-Term Work Permits

15. (SBU) Iran has also tried to tie the Amayash III process to six-month work permits allowing men to remain in Iran legally but requiring their families to return to Afghanistan. Iran's Ministry

KABUL 00001817 002 OF 002

of Labor, which recognizes the need for Afghan labor, supports work permits but met opposition from Iran's Ministry of Interior -- which considers refugees a crime and narcotics vector -- and its subordinate Refugee Department (BAFIA). Refugees are interested: UNHCR estimates that approximately 80,000 work permit applications were submitted from among the one million+ Amayesh III registrees. (Based on the last Amayesh data, there were roughly 260,000 Afghan males of working age.) BAFIA continues to be ambiguous on whether work permits will be offered, and the pros (short-term certainty of status) and cons (forcing women and children back, need to support two households, recurring visa fees) are still evolving.

Show Us The Money

16. (SBU) BAFIA has balked at signing the latest Tri-Partite Agreement until UNHCR and MORR agree to designate Land Allocation Scheme (LAS) sites for Afghans returning from Iran. They also want a share of the money they see going to Pakistan as part of the \$100/person cash grant Afghans receive upon repatriating from Pakistan. We understand that the Afghan government, at Iran's request, invited BAFIA Director General Ghaemi to Kabul to discuss deportations and work permits but he has not yet responded. BAFIA now seems to have suddenly dropped some of its demands but wants to postpone further Tri-Partite talks until after the international Refugee Conference in Kabul in November.

No Go Areas Policy May Finally Be Implemented

17. (SBU) Iran's No Go Areas (NGA) policy, begun in October but implemented unevenly in each province, may finally start kicking in (Ref B). June 20th was the apparent deadline for relocation within Iran, with a focus on clearing Sistaan-Baluchestan Province of all Afghans. UNHCR appears reluctant to push back against Iran on the NGA policy, which the Iranians justify on national security grounds. While local authorities remain ambivalent, the central government seems intent on more rigorous enforcement this time.

The Future of Afghan Refugees in Iran

18. (SBU) Any mass deportation of illegal undocumented Afghans would likely be met by a muted response from UNHCR. Like PRM, their mandate extends only to documented refugees, and strong public

criticism by UNHCR may only entrench those in Iran who use Afghan refugees as scapegoats for domestic political purposes. But Iran will likely begin deportations with completely undocumented migrants and only turn to the more contentious Amayesh II and III holders after the international community's attention has faded.

¶9. (SBU) UNHCR reports that Iranian authorities appear resigned to a continued Afghan refugee presence in Iran but still want the international community to do more to boost refugee return and reintegration in Afghanistan. They hope to undertake a joint assessment with UNHCR to review current reintegration projects that could be reserved explicitly for refugees and deportees from Iran. One possibility: the Land Allocation Site in Taki Naqi, outside of Herat, where PRM has funded a major shelter, water, and livelihoods project. UNHCR is loathe to accept such a deal, which it believes could fuel wholesale deportation and dumping of refugees in still undeveloped (and problematic) LAS sites.

¶10. (SBU) As refugees from Pakistan continue to strain Afghanistan's absorption capacity in the east (Ref C), large-scale deportations from Iran could contribute to a similar mushrooming of informal camps and settlements in the west that would require emergency assistance. UNHCR's quiet new strategy of achieving "predictability of staying" in Iran may be the best hope at staving off the political and economic instability that would follow a mass deportation event.

WOOD